

Rep. Virginia Foxx (NC-5) Opening Remarks
Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy and Human Resources
Hearing entitled "Gangs, Fraud and Sexual Predators: Struggling with the
Consequences of Illegal Immigration"

April 12, 2006

Thank you Chairman Souder.

During the decade I served as a member of the North Carolina State Legislature and during my first fifteen months in the United States Congress, I have found that few issues trouble my constituency as much as illegal immigration – and for good reason.

There truly is no issue more important to our nation than the safety and security of our constituents and the American way of life, and border security is the starting point for ensuring that security. If we do not keep Americans safe at home, then the dozens of other issues we debate in Congress simply will not matter.

The terrorist attacks on our homeland highlighted the potential disastrous effects of porous borders and the need to bolster border security, but the problem of illegal immigration also has additional far-reaching dangerous effects. Ultimately it punishes all who follow the laws of the United States.

Immigration affects virtually every aspect of life in America. With millions of legal and illegal immigrants settling in the United States each year, a level higher than any other time during our nation's history, illegal immigration has a major negative impact on education, health care, Social Security, taxes, employment, wages, the environment, crime and countless other areas of American life.

I sympathize with those who desperately wish to live the American dream here, on American soil. I understand their desire for liberty, free markets, property rights, and guaranteed freedoms. The demand for access to America is a resounding testament to the greatness of our Nation. However, immigration laws exist to provide the necessary steps for safe and legal entry into this country.

Illegal immigration must be stopped; but we cannot and should not close our doors to those who wish to enter the country legally. We must increase our efforts to achieve closed borders with open, guarded doors. We have an immigration process in place that simply must be followed. It also must be strictly enforced – much more rigorously than it is being enforced now. We are a nation of immigrants, but we are also a nation of laws.

Expedited identification of illegal immigrants, enhanced and increased border patrol, and stiff penalties for employers and businesses that knowingly employ illegals are all necessary to secure our borders and successfully combat illegal immigration. Our border control and law

enforcement agents should be empowered to crack down on illegal immigration and protect our borders.

My constituents and local law enforcement officials all echo the same concern that we must move from our unfortunate current policy of inaction in relationship to dealing with illegal immigrants to one that ensures there are consequences for illegal behavior. They are especially frustrated that we do not swiftly deport illegal immigrants – especially those who commit other crimes. As members of Congress we must be receptive to their concerns and cannot lose sight of this major problem. We must do all we can to establish and enforce a thorough and fastidious system for deterring, identifying and dealing with illegal immigrants. Illegal immigration is a multi-faceted problem that will require a multi-faceted solution.

A major part of that solution must include educating the public about the real costs and consequences to America of illegal immigration. That is why we are here today. I have long fought for tighter immigration controls, reflecting the sentiments of my constituents. The testimony these witnesses are about to offer is necessary to shed light on just how serious the problem truly is. Our counties and communities, now saturated with illegal immigrants, are spending billions of dollars on public health and education, law enforcement and social services for people who are not even legally allowed to be here. Every dollar spent on an illegal immigrant is a dollar that was diverted away from a law abiding, tax-paying citizen.

The burden of dealing with illegal immigration largely falls on the shoulders of the officials who will testify today. The responsibility for solving the problem of illegal immigration at a national level largely falls on the shoulders of the U.S. Congress. The purpose of this investigatory and oversight hearing is to expose and address the problem, educate the Committee, and work towards crafting the most appropriate solutions.

Chairman Souder and I held a field hearing, similar to this one, in Caldwell County yesterday to discuss the horrible problem of methamphetamine abuse in North Carolina's mountain counties. I have been working with local law enforcement for many years to eradicate meth production, and we have had dramatic success. However, since we have driven local meth labs out of the area, the illicit drug is now being smuggled into North Carolina from the Mexican border. In fact over 80% of meth in North Carolina now comes from Mexican sources. This leads to dramatic increases in violent crime and wreaks havoc on our law enforcement personnel. Just when they had nearly eliminated the supply portion of the supply and demand equation relating to the meth crisis, a brand new supply presented itself with crystal meth being smuggled into our communities from Mexico.

With drugs comes crime – violent crime. And increased violent crime poses a very dangerous problem for our communities, not only directly but also indirectly as police forces normally *preventing* crime become diluted in *responding* to crime. Several of the mountain counties I represent are unfortunate examples of such a problem. Those counties generally enjoy a very low crime rate. However, in recent years, they have had several methamphetamine-related homicides and violent robberies. This drug is wreaking havoc in our local neighborhoods and is endangering the lives of many, including our innocent children and our brave law enforcement officials.

Illegal immigration is consistently the number one topic that my constituents write about and call my office with their concerns. It is also the number one problem expressed to me by many of the local officials I represent, some of whom you will hear from today. Politics must be set aside so that we can concretely identify the severity of the problem and begin to craft solutions. The very freedoms that attract immigrants to our great nation will erode if we do not take action to enforce and protect our laws. I look forward to a constructive dialogue and thank the Chairman and our panelists for joining me today.